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REPORT
OF
A Committee
FOR
CONDUCTING AN INQUIRY
INTO
THE STATE OF
THE SICK POOR.

Price 1s. 6d.

If this subject had been raised
ed into by the Council of the
Royal College of Surgeons (or any
other of the chartered and privi-
leged bodies of medical practice
in London at the time I pre-
sented myself before them -
- there would have been no
occasion for the present Parlia-
mentary Inquiry -

R. L. S.

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REPORT
OF
A Committee
FOR
CONDUCTING AN INQUIRY
INTO
The State of the Sick Poor.

WARWICK, SEPTEMBER 15, 1827.

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1827.

REPORT.

THE attention of many of the Members of the above Committee has been, for some years past, more or less directed to the prevalent mode of providing for the medical and surgical care of the Sick Poor, in their respective neighbourhoods. The professional and other duties of most of them have afforded peculiar opportunities of observing the operation of the system of letting the Sick Poor of Parishes, for an annual stipend, to the lowest bidder, among such medical practitioners as offer to take the charge of them; and of ascertaining that these contracts are entered into without a constant regard to the probability of the practitioner being enabled to perform the duty undertaken by him; sometimes without a due consideration of the character and acquirements of the person proposing himself; and generally without a just attention to the necessities of the parish, or the fair remuneration of the medical or surgical attendant.

Repeated opportunities of verifying these circumstances, a growing belief that these arrangements were among the frequent causes of increasing the demands upon

the Poor's Rates, and the strong representations made on several occasions by different medical gentlemen, led some of the Committee to attend a meeting, held at Southam four years ago, for the purpose of bringing the subject under more formal consideration, and of deliberating concerning the best means of ascertaining the extent of the evil supposed to exist, as well of applying an efficient remedy to it. Various particulars were stated on that occasion, strongly corroborative of the views already briefly alluded to; and MR. SMITH, surgeon to the Eye and Ear Infirmary of that place, brought forward a plan for consideration, to the formation of which he had for some years devoted a considerable portion of his time, and of which the object was to abolish the system of Farming the Sick Poor of Parishes, substituting, in all parts of the Kingdom, the establishment of small District Dispensaries, or Infirmarys, for the labouring poor; open to all who were resident within six miles of such charitable institution; supported partly by parochial contributions, partly by subscriptions, and partly by the contributions of such of the labouring poor as were able and willing to put by small sums, as a kind of insurance against the expenses of sickness; the District Dispensaries or Infirmarys being attended by all the respectable practitioners in the neighbourhood, whose remuneration was to be provided for out of the ample funds thus proposed to be raised.

Although the individuals before whom this plan was laid, at the above-mentioned Meeting, in 1823, did not consider themselves prepared to give a decided opinion concerning the probable operation of all the parts of it, they determined to co-operate with Mr. Smith in the establish-

ment of such a District Dispensary at Southam, in order that the practicability of the proposal might be fairly tried.

The District Dispensary thus formed, has, up to the present time, continued in full operation. In July, 1826, (three years after its foundation), those who attended the former meeting again met at Southam, as well as several other individuals, including some of the medical practitioners of the neighbourhood, and a Report was made of the state and progress of the Institution; and, although it was evident to the Committee that its success had been mainly attributable to the personal exertions of Mr. Smith, and even to considerable pecuniary sacrifices made by that gentleman, there was so much reason to believe that if instead of being an isolated and peculiar institution, it had been one among many of the same kind, and consequently upheld by the general support of the neighbourhood, or even that if subscriptions had been more anxiously sought for, it would have been carried on without such sacrifices, and with such beneficial effects as completely to warrant its adoption in other districts, and indeed its general adoption throughout the Kingdom, that the Meeting resolved to take the further steps which have led to the necessity of making the present Report.

These steps consisted of an expression, by the Meeting, of their disapprobation of the present system of Farming the Sick Parochial Poor, and their opinion that the expenses of sickness were a frequent cause of pauperism; and a resolution to endeavour to collect such information, by means of an extensive correspondence, as might enable them to represent the extent and effects of these circum-

stances; and to obtain suggestions concerning the practicability of amendment and the mode of attempting it. For this correspondence DR. CONOLLY was empowered to make arrangements; and the circular letter, consequently forwarded by him to all parts of England, contained the following queries:—

1.—What is the general plan of providing Medical and Surgical Attendance for the Parish Poor, in your neighbourhood?

2.—Does it appear to you that this plan is open to serious objections; or, do you consider it efficient to the end proposed,—namely, providing for proper attendance on Sick Paupers?

3.—Can you suggest any plan which you consider more efficient, and at the same time practicable, and capable of general application?

4.—Do you think that, generally speaking, the expenses of sickness lead more frequently than any other circumstance to application for, and dependance upon, Parish Relief?

5.—Are you of opinion that any system of mutual assurance, against the expenses of sickness, could obviate this evil?

6.—From an outline of the Plan now forwarded to you, does it appear to you that Mr. Smith's District Dispensaries, if generally established throughout the country, would have this effect?

A year having elapsed during the progress of this correspondence, the Committee re-assembled at Warwick, in July, 1827, and perused with great attention all the replies which had been received; together with extracts from

publications, which had been presented to the Committee, from various quarters, in order to facilitate their investigation. It appeared to the Committee that the only manner in which the information contained in so many letters, (some of which were voluminous), could be made useful to the public, was by presenting it in the form of a brief summary, or general statement; and to convey such statement is the principal object of the present remarks, which it was conceived would be more intelligible if preceded by some account of the previous operations of the Committee.

The letters which are now in the possession of the Committee represent that the system of Farming the Sick Poor of Parishes, is more or less general in all of the following Counties: — Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Devonshire, Essex, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Rutland, Somersetshire, Shropshire, Suffolk, Sussex, Warwickshire, Wiltshire, Worcestershire, and Yorkshire; communications having been received from these counties. There is reason to suppose that the same system prevails in those counties from which no answers have been received;—and the returns made on the occasion of a former Inquiry, (an abstract of which is inserted in the 1st vol. of the “Transactions of the Associated Apothecaries,” published in 1823), prove its existence in Middlesex, Surrey, Dorsetshire, Cornwall, and Berwickshire: so that there is sufficient ground to conclude that this is the ordinary way in which provision is made for the Sick Poor of Parishes, in every part of the country. The only exceptions mentioned in the correspondence, consist of small single parishes, or

a few of larger size, chiefly in large towns, in which the concerns of the poor are wholly regulated by local acts. In such instances, the allowance made to the medical man is always more liberal than where parishes are farmed, and the attendance on the poor is reported to be efficient. The same end is effected in some other places by the payment of an annual sum to a Dispensary, such payment being made by the overseers.

That the consequences of the Contract or Farming System are far less satisfactory, either as regards the contracting parties, or the objects of the contract, is proved by indisputable evidence from all parts of the country above-mentioned. If there are one or two exceptions among the correspondents to those who speak of these contracts with abhorrence, they either occur in those who live in small parishes very favourably situated, and who confess their want of a wider experience, or who, by acknowledging that the system is only advantageous when the parties contracting are strictly conscientious, virtually give up the principle of the existing arrangements. Indeed, if the Committee were not more anxious to engage the reason than to excite the feelings of the public in the cause which has so long occupied their attention, they might quote many expressions from their correspondents, indicative of their unmeasured disapprobation of a system necessarily productive of numerous instances of neglect and cruelty. Nor can it be a matter of surprise that such expressions should be called forth, even from moderate persons, supposing them to be attentive to what is daily taking place in their parishes, and not wholly destitute of humanity. It has been already stated, that the contracts

are, almost in all cases, made to the disadvantage of the medical attendant; so that the practitioner generally looks for compensation to holding many parishes at once, some of which, are of course, distant from his residence; and his views are seconded by the erroneous policy of the overseers, who often give a preference to the most distant resident, or the most ignorant practitioner, because such persons offer to take the parishes on the lowest terms. In these transactions, there is often such a total disregard of fairness, and so entire and evident a sacrifice of the well-doing of the Sick Poor, that parishes containing five or six hundred paupers, have been taken for five or six pounds;—twenty or thirty parishes have been farmed by one practitioner;—and even a large parish actually farmed for one guinea per annum! It is almost unnecessary for the Committee to point out that such contracts, by which their medical correspondents represent themselves as at once wronged and degraded, entail the most serious evils on the poor population of the country, and consequently, on the public;—that poor patients are often neglected in serious disorders;—that many become incurable and helpless from such neglect, and necessarily thenceforth burdensome to their parishes;—that the poor people generally are rendered discontented, by a knowledge of these circumstances, and therefore, to their own great detriment, frequently delay to apply for medical aid until all aid is in vain; and being apparently protected by formal and delusive provisions, against the evils of sickness, and therefore perhaps excluded from the attentions of benevolent persons, to whom they are known, it sometimes happens that lives are lost which might have been saved.

As in the opinion of some of the Members of the Committee, the expenses incurred by sickness were not only a frequent cause of pauperism, but led more generally than any other circumstances to applications for, and dependence upon, parish relief, it was thought advisable to insert a Query relating to this subject. The answers to it have been remarkably opposed to one another. Many of the correspondents, including a majority of the medical men who have replied to the Circular, answer the query very decidedly in the affirmative; others, including some whose means of judging are extensive, and who are known to have very attentively considered the question, give a negative reply, with as little qualification. Those residing in the manufacturing districts, seem to consider the improvidence of the poor as the chief cause of pauperism,—adding to this cause others which have lowered the character of the manufacturing poor,—as for instance, what is called the “house-row system;” and laying the least stress on the circumstance of sickness. This apparent discrepancy of the answers, is perhaps in some measure attributable to the wording of the query; for the strong assurances given to the Committee from many places that the first application for parish relief, on the part of the honest and industrious poor, most commonly arises from the occurrence of sickness in their families, are not weakened by contrary representations derived from the Vestries of the parishes, before whom applications limited to the demand for medical aid, are often, it seems, not brought in any way. If such be the real state of the case, as there can be little doubt that after the first application to the parish for relief in any shape, the shame of solicitation is

destroyed, it is surely most desirable to place within the reach of the deserving poor, that prompt and efficient medical aid, during illness, which would shorten the interruption given to profitable industry, and restore the labourer's family to health, or the labourer himself to his work, unembarrassed by debt and undegraded by pauperism. And this leads to the important consideration of the means of effecting so desirable an end.

The greater number of those with whom the Committee have corresponded, profess themselves unable to devise a system; capable of general application, by which all the disadvantages of farming the poor would be removed; and there is a general accord among them as to the inadequacy of Friendly Societies to meet the evil. Some of the correspondents bear testimony to the utility of certain arrangements adopted in their particular neighbourhoods; for example,—paying the parish surgeon, as is done in some parts of Buckinghamshire, one guinea per week, and half-a-guinea extra for surgical cases, and one guinea for each midwifery case. All the other plans mentioned, with some exceptions, (presently to be spoken of) and all the suggestions offered to the Committee, are resolvable into the plain and just principle of ensuring proper attendance on the sick, and proper remuneration to the attendant;—either by the establishment of small hospitals, dispensaries; parochial medicine chests, or by the regulation and superintendence of the Magistrates and Gentry, &c., &c.;—and for the success of nearly every plan proposed, the opinion of the proposers is that the interference of the Legislature will be indispensable. MR. YEATMAN, of Frome, who has evidently paid great attention to the sub-

ject, obligingly forwarded to the Committee a pamphlet, of which he is the author, and addressed two very able letters to the Secretary, in answer to the Queries. His proposition, which is given in greater detail than the rest, comprehends the partial, not the complete, abolition of contracts: he would interdict them only where the pauper population is less than fifty; and where it is greater, would have them better regulated. He refers to the arrangements existing in the army for providing medical attendance on detachments unaccompanied by a medical officer; in which case, one penny a week, per man, is allowed to a practitioner, for medicines and attendance; or, if the detachment is very small, sixpence a month, per man: and he proposes that in parishes of which the pauper population exceeds fifty, three shillings per head should be paid to a surgeon, such surgeon residing on the spot; or if the surgeon resides in another place, five shillings per head. In larger parishes, containing more than a thousand paupers, he would have the sum reduced to two shillings per head, per annum; with half-price for children. His plan includes the establishment of small district dispensaries,—the employment of the surgeons in rotation,—and a power in the paymasters of each parish to withhold part of the salary where the attendance has not been satisfactory.

A perusal of the Rules of the District Dispensaries, proposed by Mr. Smith, of Southam, (*see Appendix*) will shew, that whilst his plan embraces all the provisions of the rest, it is considerably more comprehensive. It contemplates the establishment of one uniform system throughout the kingdom, (admitting of slight modifications to suit the

different character and resources of the population of different districts);—ensuring proper attendance on the poor, when sick;—providing for the just remuneration of medical practitioners;—and giving to all the medical men of each district an opportunity for exertion:—and it goes beyond these arrangements so far as to extend help to a class just above the paupers, but yet supporting themselves by manual labour; too poor to pay for proper medical attendance, and yet desirous of keeping above the parish:—it furnishes to this humble, but valuable description of persons, the means of providing medical aid, when sickness occurs in their families: and thus, if the representations above alluded to, concerning the causes of pauperism, be correct, it directly tends to limit that vast and increasing evil.

It was considered desirable to circulate an outline of the plan, just spoken of, with the queries of the Committee; and it is proper to state, that the opinion of the different correspondents, concerning its practicability, vary considerably. Yet, although there is great diversity of opinion respecting the details, the principle of the District Dispensaries seems to be very generally, almost universally, approved; many of the correspondents express their approbation of the whole plan, in the warmest manner; and by far the greater number think it preferable to any other that they could suggest. Those of the correspondents who are resident in, and near Southam, and consequently, witnesses, and the only witnesses, of the plan in actual operation, have invariably spoken of its effects in terms of praise.—(*See Appendix*). Doubts are expressed by some of the writers, concerning the possible establish-

ment of District Dispensaries, on Mr. Smith's plan, in poor districts; and others think them ill-adapted to large communities. The statements given concerning the poverty, degradation, and almost universal pauperism, of some agricultural districts, certainly affords little hope of establishing any institutions, not in the first instance dependant for support on the contributions of the rich alone: but, among the attempts which may eventually be made to improve the condition of the wretched inhabitants of such districts, it cannot be doubted that facilities of obtaining prompt attention during illness will be found important. The details of the District Dispensaries are by some considered too complicated; and by others, not sufficiently comprehensive: and some alterations are proposed, which it is unnecessary to speak of in this Report. There is, in many of the letters which have been received, a degree of praise given to Benefit Clubs, in preference to District Dispensaries; and this is apparently founded on the belief that the provision made for the Sick, by the rules of these Institutions, is the best which those who wish to contribute towards providing for such an accident, can possibly procure. But the Committee are assured by the Medical Practitioners associated with them in this Inquiry, that, although the allowance made to the Members of some Clubs, during sickness, is very liberal, medical and surgical attendance upon them is actually *farmed*; and that the arrangements of this nature, made by the Stewards of the Clubs, are in no degree exempt from the common disadvantages of such contracts. It is also stated, on the same authority, that the Benefit or Friendly Clubs are open to another, and a very great objection; inasmuch as they

enable members who are in very easy circumstances, and who ought to pay the surgeon, to procure his assistance on the Club account. In both these particulars, the Clubs are directly in hostility to the principles on which it is presumed to be essential that new arrangements should invariably be made:—they do not make sure and sufficient provision for medical and surgical attendance on their sick poor;—and they discourage exertion and independence in those of the members who are in better circumstances.

In conclusion, it may be stated, as the prevalent opinion among those who have favoured the Queries of the Committee with their attention, that it would be difficult to devise any plan of which the effects would be *more* objectionable, than those of the present system of Farming the Sick Poor; that any alteration would imply improvement; and that there exists little hope of general and lasting amendment, without the interference of Parliament.

From this brief Summary of the Correspondence in which they have been engaged, the Committee conceive it will sufficiently appear, that the present arrangements, relating to the Sick Poor of English Parishes, are cruel towards the sick, degrading to the medical profession, and productive of unnecessary burthens on the Poor's Rates: and that it is incumbent upon all who desire to improve the character of the lower classes, not to neglect any plan by which the poor would be made more independent, and more comfortable; from which some would learn the advantages of being provident whilst in health and ca-

pable of exertion, and would experience the comfort of being relieved out of a fund raised as a provision against sickness, in part out of their own earnings; and those too poor to effect this, including all the most unfortunate and destitute part of society, would be made sure, at least, of receiving humane attention, when the evils of sickness were added to the inconveniences of poverty. To both these classes of people, when once a system, comprising all these benefits, shall have been established throughout England, better prospects will be held out; and in both, better feelings will be generated. The contributions made by the rich, being voluntary, will be far more cheerfully paid than in the form of Poor's Rates; and the benefits conferred upon the poor will be far more gratefully received than any allowance from the Parish. And as the blessing of education is daily making the working classes better able to appreciate the good effects of industrious and frugal habits, even the poorest among them may be expected gradually to conform to plans, demanding very trifling temporary sacrifices from them, and offering them no less a recompense than the substitution of comfort and independence, for a life of hopeless labour and an old age of unavoidable pauperism!

The Committee, relying on the correctness of the statements elicited during the Inquiry which they now conclude, and on the justness of the views founded thereupon; can, of course, but determine to spare no

exertions, by which the further attention of the public may be drawn to this subject; including an application to Parliament; or whatever other measures may seem more expedient, and most conducive to the removal of the evils shewn to arise from the present mode of providing Medical and Surgical Attendance on the Sick Poor.



APPENDIX.

No. I. (Page 14.)

Plan of a District Dispensary, proposed by Mr. Smith of Southam, with his Observations on some of the Rules.

1.—That a General Infirmary and Dispensary be established at————open for all the labouring poor, who are resident within six miles of that place.*

* Any small town, or considerable village in the kingdom, there being two general practitioners in the district; thus 10,000 inhabitants will yield, generally, in agricultural districts, 6000 persons proper to become subscribers. This would produce an income of £750 per annum; to which may be added £300, the sum parishes would pay at the rate of £3 for every hundred of their population; a sum not more than they on an average now pay, where extras are not included in the contract, with an occasional law suit, or other expenses, for the removal of a sick pauper. From this £1050, £250 would be required for drugs, rent, wine, collectors and secretaries' per centage; and the remaining 800l may be divided amongst the surgeons for their services.

2.—That it be supported by voluntary contributions, and by individual and parochial subscriptions; the latter after the rate of £2 per annum, for every hundred of inhabitants in all villages situated within three miles, and £3 per annum, for every hundred in all villages beyond that distance.*

3.—That mechanics, servants, and labourers, who are not strictly denominated poor, and who may be desirous of availing themselves of the advantages of this institution, be allowed to do so, on contributing annually 3s. 6d. each. (*Free Members.*)

4.—That every female subscriber of 3s. 6d. shall be entitled to medical attendance, (midwifery excepted).†

* When overseers are honestly advised, they will attend to facts that must convince them, that an apparently great increase in their contract to the Public Dispensary, is better policy, than the lowest terms of a private practitioner, as it enables a great many of their poor to shake off, in their occasionally recurring illnesses, thenceforth, all necessity for parish aid in this respect—(which constitutes three-fourths of their applications to overseers) and, as it practically teaches the poor in early life their ability, and the advantages of providing against the necessities of sickness, they will be led to enter Friendly Societies, at that age, that the contributions will always be within their means;—and wages, *even now*, will enable *all* well disposed single persons to pay to the Dispensary, as well as to the new Friendly Societies, for pay in sickness and for an annuity in old age. A scale might easily be formed for married labourers with children, and, likewise offering lower terms for length of continuance as members.

† If these sums could be lowered to 2s. for each adult, and 1s. per annum for each child, and collected quarterly, *none* would be left (excepting the crippled and old), with a plea for not belonging to the Dispensary.

5.—The subscriptions for children under the age of fifteen to be 2s. each per annum.

6.—That subscribers of one guinea per annum may recommend 3 patients (cases of midwifery excepted). (*Charity Patients.*)

7.—That annual subscribers of one guinea shall annually elect a committee of twenty from among themselves, who, with the overseers of the subscribing parishes, forming part of the committee, shall have the direction of the establishment.*

8.—That Messrs. A. B. C. be appointed surgeons to the institution, and any, or every regular medical practitioner, residing in the district, be admitted into the establishment at the discretion of the committee.†

9.—That Mr. A. be appointed to attend every Monday and Thursday from ten to eleven.

That Mr. B. on Tuesday and Friday.

That Mr. C. on Wednesday and Saturday.

10.—That 2s. 6d. be allowed for every journey within three miles of the infirmary, and for every additional visit in the same place 1s., and for every mile beyond that distance 9d. or

That after the expenses of the medicines, and all other demands on the funds are

* Whilst the committee should have a controul over the funds,—the election of the officers, collectors, nurses, messengers, &c., may properly become a part of the business of the *Free Members* at their anniversary.—These elections would give a great stimulus to the whole body.

† Thus opening a field for early practice to all qualified persons, without any sacrifice of money or principle—at present too frequently made to obtain it,

paid, £50 (for the current expenses of the institution) be then kept in the treasurer's hands, the remainder to be divided between the surgeons, in proportion to the number of miles travelled and visits made; each surgeon to deliver in a monthly account of his journeys and visits to the secretary, from which his allowance shall be calculated.

11.—That the poor shall have the privilege of being attended at home by such one of the surgeons as they may desire, upon sending an order signed by the minister of the parish, or the overseers.

12.—That the poor of subscribing parishes, who may be able to attend the infirmary, upon observing the appointed hours, and producing evidence of their belonging to such a parish, require no other recommendation. (*Pauper Patients.*)

13.—That all medicines be purchased by the surgeons, under the direction of the committee. The surgeons to find their own instruments, except trusses.

14.—That lodgings, and accommodations, for patients requiring frequent attendance, be procured at the expense of the funds, provided they have no accommodation for sick in the house.*

* *The amount of these sums may vary:—the following extract from the Report of the Eye and Ear Infirmary, will shew how nearly they may be calculated.*

“The terms for board for the Men are 6s.; for the Women 5s.; and for the Children 3s. 6d. per week.”

That they were not fixed upon improper calculations appears from the circumstance, that, at the end of five years' housekeeping, there is only a profit to the house of 5l. 9s. 6d.—a sum which would indeed be somewhat increased, if all the debts due were paid; but when the sums are to be collected from indigent patients, or from

15.—Paupers not being maintained out of the funds of the institution must, therefore, if in lodgings, be supplied immediately from their parish; and, if in the infirmary, will be provided for by the housekeeper for 5*s.* 6*d.* each per week, and if under ten years of age 3*s.* 6*d.*—Her accounts are separate from the funds, but regularly investigated by the committee.

16.—That under unavoidable circumstances that may require the absence of the surgeon officiating, he shall provide a substitute.

17.—That no important operation in the infirmary be performed without the attendance of two surgeons. The operating surgeon only shall be allowed to introduce visitors to an operation.

18.—That the committee (five constituting a majority) meet on the first Monday in every month.

19.—That a treasurer and secretary be appointed, the latter with a salary.

20.—That in extreme cases, the surgeon, if he thinks it expedient, do call in the aid of such neighbouring physician as he may think proper, whose fees shall be paid out of the funds.

21.—That notice of the physician's attendance be communicated to the surgeons of the infirmary, by the surgeon who solicits his attendance.

22.—That when the usual midwife is obliged to call in the assistance of an infirmary surgeon to the female poor

overseers of distant parishes, it has happened, and it may probably be expected ever to happen, that there will be some deficiency.

in labour, such surgeon shall be entitled to one guinea for his attendance, from the funds.

23.—That no female poor be entitled to medical attendance when in labour, on account of the establishment, but as above.

24.—That the names of the surgeons, with their days and hours of attendance, be fixed in the common room.

25.—That patients desiring a consultation of surgeons, do, with the consent of two overseers or governor, send the secretary an intimation of their wish to that effect.

26. That the poor find their own bottles, phials, and bandages, and come supplied with them after their first visit.

27.—That any complaint of inattention, or neglect of the nurse, secretary, or surgeon, be directly stated to a subscriber, who, after investigating its truth, will report it to the committee.

28.—That wine, sago, porter, &c. be ordered for the patients by the surgeon only, and kept by the nurse, who shall deliver in a monthly account of what has been thus expended.*

* The advantages of wine, cordials, occasional nurses, and attendance at an annual festival, &c. should be confined to the *Free Members*. Every inducement should be held out to win the affections of those who are desirous of being self dependent, and no means would distinguish them so much from the man who relies on *charity* or the *poor rates*, as not having occasion (under common circumstances) to apply for any assistance; and a wide and marked division would be made where it is most wanted in society,—by enabling all persons to distinguish the valuable and honest poor, from the wilful, degraded, workhouse *inheritor*.

29.—That every patient admitted into the house do conform to the rules thereof, or be discharged, and a report of the cause of his dismissal be made to the party who recommended him.

No. II. (*Page 15.*)

At a Public Meeting held at the Craven Arms Inn, Southam, March the 20th, 1826, to take into consideration the report of MR. SMITH'S Dispensary, and which meeting was attended by nearly all the principal inhabitants of the parish,

It was resolved,—"That it appears to this meeting the *self dependent members* who have entered the Dispensary deserve the notice and thanks of the public for their efforts to provide as far as they can for the expense of sickness, and that it is the intention of the undersigned to be present at their general meeting at the National School Room."

There were other resolutions,—and four gentlemen took upon themselves the arrangements, &c. and afterwards expressed themselves "well pleased with the opportunity they had thus had of observing the class of persons of which the meeting consisted. They are composed of those who are enabled by their subscription to do without parish relief in case of sickness, for which they must otherwise invariably apply; and of others who, though of a class superior to that just mentioned, would yet be subjected to

embarrassment, and subsequently pauperism, from the expenses attendant on sickness.”—These gentlemen further “gladly bore their testimony to the orderly conduct of both these classes on that occasion, and expressed their opinion that meetings of this kind are productive of the best effects, both by acting as an encouragement to the labouring classes to depend on their own exertions, and promoting kind, cheerful, and neighbourly feelings amongst those assembled.—At these meetings the wives and families (*being Free Members also*) attend, and an attention to propriety of demeanour is thus produced, which cannot very easily be maintained at the Ordinary Meetings of Benefit Clubs, where the salutary restraint arising out of this arrangement is not exercised.”

No. III. (*Page 15.*)

*The following Resolution was likewise made at Easter,
at a very full Meeting.*

Vestry Room, Southam, March 23rd, 1827.

“That as Visitor of the Poor of the parish of Southam, I have had full opportunity during the past year, of becoming acquainted with the effects of the District Dispensary established by MR. SMITH in this town, and I think it right to state that in my opinion it has diminished the number of applicants for Parish Relief, and consequently improved the feelings of the labouring part of the

population—of upwards of two hundred persons now subscribing to the above District Dispensary, it appears that one-half would most probably, but for that institution, have been at this time on their respective Parish Lists.

(Signed) PRESTON MASH, Visitor.*

No. IV. (*Page 15.*)

ON PUBLIC CHARITIES.

SOUTHAM DISPENSARY.

(From the Christian Remembrancer, Sept. 1827.)

MR. EDITOR.—A correspondent in your last number having adverted to a Dispensary established in my parish in Warwickshire, I am induced to trouble you with a few remarks on the subject;—and the more so, because from

* The Poor of Southam are managed under Gilbert's Act 1.

EXPLANATORY NOTE BY MR. SMITH.

The total number of subscribers is 320. The amount of their subscription, and the subscription of Southam Parish (for one half year) is £61. 2s. 3d. The disbursements, including the expense of the Festival for the free members, was £42. 11s. 4d. The sum thus left to remunerate the medical attendant is £18. 14s. 11d. and it is particularly to be remembered that this is produced without the benefit of *Honorary Subscriptions*—and that the wine fund, the expense of linen, the rent, a subscription to Northampton Hospital, &c. &c. are now paid by the subscription of the free members—With the assistance

the manner in which the institution is mentioned, it might be supposed that I am the founder of it, whereas, the only praise that I can claim is, that I have from the beginning perceived its utility, and have endeavoured to support and promote it by every means in my power. Its author is Mr. Henry L. Smith, a surgeon of this place; who, having devised and digested the plan of this Dispensary, has since carried it into execution with a steadiness and perseverance, which can be appreciated only by those who, like myself, have known the difficulties with which he had to contend, more especially in the outset. And of the same gentleman, I think it an act of justice farther to say, that his enlightened views, on the subject of the true interests of the labouring classes, entitle him to be heard with the greatest attention, on every point connected with that most important question.

I do not pretend to enter into the details of the Southam Dispensary, because they are fully given in a small Tract,* which Mr. Smith has published on the subject. I will only observe, that it proceeds (in its most important department) on a principle, I believe peculiar to this Dispensary; viz. that the independent poor entitle themselves to its benefits in case of illness, by their prospective contribu-

of Honorary subscriptions for these purposes—it is therefore in no degree doubtful, that there will always be a more than sufficient surplus to remunerate the medical officers for the time and exertions they will be called upon to devote to the Institution.

* Its title is, “Observations on the prevailing practice of supplying the Poor with Medical Assistance, commonly called Farming the Poor,”—Printed by the Philanthropic Society.

tions when in health. Thus it becomes a sort of medical insurance. And small as is the sum to be paid,—viz. three shillings and sixpence for an adult, and two shillings for a child annually,—I am happy to say, that its calculations have been so well formed, and so many persons in this parish and immediate vicinity have been found willing, in health, to make a provision against sickness, that the funds are sufficient, not only to pay the necessary expenses of drugs, &c. but also to provide a remuneration to the surgeon,—I will not say adequate to his services, for scarcely any pecuniary payment could be a recompense for the good, of which he has been the instrument, but equal to the sum which he could expect to have received had the average number of sick among the same individuals become his patients, and been left to pay a medical bill from their own resources. At the same time, a great benefit has been conferred both on those contributors who have maintained their health, and on those who have been visited with sickness. The former have felt secure and easy, so far as the question of expense is concerned, against the disastrous effects of an attack of illness. The latter have had the advantage of medical advice and attendance, without submitting to either to the two alternatives, from which I can hardly see how the sick poor can otherwise escape, either of incurring medical bills which they cannot discharge, or of being consigned to the care of the parish doctor, and so of having their feelings of independence once violated, and of taking the *first step in that down-

* I believe that in the Report of the Evidence on the Poor Laws, taken before the House of Commons, there is no notice of sickness as

ward and slippery path of pauperism, from which so few are able afterwards to recover themselves.

It is principally with a reference to this last consideration that I have been tempted to offer these few remarks. Such a Dispensary as the one now under our notice must, from its very constitution, be not only local, but contracted in its sphere of action. But I know no reason why such institutions should not be multiplied throughout the country, since they may be established in any district, where there is a resident surgeon. And, if they become frequent and popular, they seem to afford one powerful counteraction to an evil, against which we cannot too earnestly struggle, our poor-laws. This has ever appeared to me one of the worst calamities with which this country is afflicted. Within these few days, I have rejoiced to hear that the Lord Chief Justice Best, in his charge to the Grand Jury of Wiltshire, has lifted up his voice against the abominable system of paying the wages of the labourer out of the poor rates; and it is a voice which I hope will find its way to the understanding and heart of every person throughout the kingdom entrusted with any part of the administration of

one of the causes of pauperism. Yet, as it is impossible that a labourer should pay the expenses of a fit of illness either in himself or his family from his current income, and as he has seldom any funds in store, it is obvious that he can hardly avoid having recourse to his parish, and thus, even with the strongest wish to maintain himself in independence, finding his name ranked on the roll of paupers. Friendly societies may, in some measure, obviate this inconvenience. But it is well known that, in their administration, they are often liable to great abuse. The best is, that of Mr. Becher, at Southwell, Nottinghamshire.

the laws touching the poor. This, however, is but an abuse of the poor-laws; and even if this abuse should be abated, I fear that the more unexceptionable execution of the existing statutes can never extract the evil out of a system, which contains the inherent vice of levelling the distinctions between industry and idleness, frugality and extravagance, forethought and improvidence. The mischief of this system meets us at every turn. It renders unavailing some of our best efforts to amend the condition of the poor; and it so tends to foster the love of immediate indulgence natural to the human heart, that I have ever considered it a strong proof of the sterling excellence of English poor, that they are not much more deteriorated and debased, than they really are, by the baleful influence of our poor-laws. I must not, indeed, enter into a question so extensive and important, as the practicability of abolishing or reducing those legal provisions for idleness and imprudence: but I may at least express a hope that none of our voluntary and private acts shall partake of their spirit. And while I cannot but lament that many favoured and highly patronized *Charities!* are but too like the poor-laws in weakening the self-dependence of the labouring classes, I would hope that, as more enlightened views on the subject gradually make their way, every encouragement will be given to institutions which, like the Dispensary now before us, tend to make the poor industrious, frugal, and, above all other things, provident. These are virtues, which go far beyond the mere temporal good of the poor: in proportion as they prevail, individuals are invariably found to be better subjects and better christians;

better disposed to discharge every social and domestic duty in this life, and better fitted to partake of a blessed immortality in the world to come;

I am, Sir, your obedient Servant,

GEORGE CHANDLER.

Southam, Aug. 14, 1827.

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No. V.

The subject of the preceding pages has been noticed in the following, among other publications.

Observations on the prevailing practice of supplying the poor with medical assistance, commonly called the farming of the parishes. by H. L. Smith, Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, London; and Surgeon to the Eye and Ear Infirmary, Warwickshire. Printed by the Philanthropic Society, 1819.

A Treatise on the state of the poor in sickness, by R. Worthington, M. D. Ludlow, 1804.

Remarks on the medical care of parochial poor, by J. C. Yeatman, Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, and Surgeon Extraordinary to H. R. H. the Duke of Gloucester. London, 1818.

Protestant Sisters of Charity; a Letter addressed to the Lord Bishop of London, developing a Plan for im-

proving the arrangements at present existing for administering medical advice and visiting the Sick Poor. London, 1826.

Observations on the necessity of establishing a different system of affording Medical Relief to the Sick Poor, than by the practice of contracting with Medical Men, or the Farming of Parishes. By J. F. Hulbert, Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, &c. Shrewsbury, 1827.

Reviews and Notices in THE LONDON MEDICAL REPOSITORY.—March, 1826,—February and July, 1827.

*see also the County Reports—
and the Saturday Magazine
for Decr last—also the Medical
Gazette.*

THE END.

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R. Lapworth, Printer, and Bookbinder, Stratford-upon-Avon.

